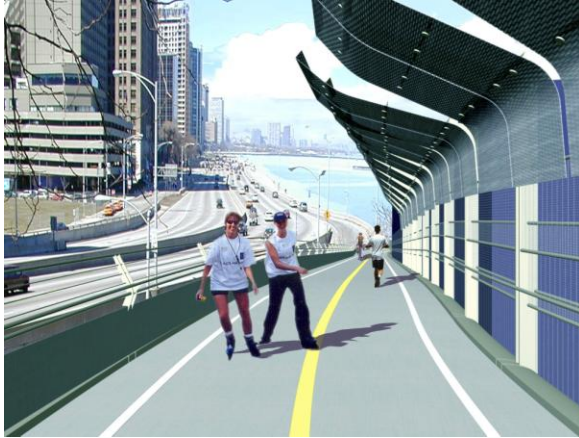


Work beginning on 'Navy Pier Flyover' to improve lakefront trail

March 18, 2014|By Blair Kamin | Tribune critic



A computer-generated image of a proposed bicycle path alongside Lake Shore Drive near Navy Pier. (Chicago Department of Transportation)

When Mayor Rahm Emanuel and Sen. Dick Durbin announced Tuesday that work was finally about to start on an elevated lakefront path near Navy Pier, one moment—apparently unscripted—spoke to the value of the \$60 million project.

From behind a podium, with TV cameras rolling, Durbin related how biking through this congested stretch of the 18-mile lakefront trail was like “bumpers cars” and [the game](#) of Whack-A-Mole. “You take your life in your hands,” he said.

Those comments, which appeared to be off the cuff, should strike a chord with anybody who’s ever biked or walked the lakefront trail. The area where Lake Shore Drive bypasses Navy Pier is an urban design mess.

At various street intersections, like those at [Illinois](#) and Grand Avenues, and on the lower level of the Lake Shore Drive bridge over the Chicago River, drivers, cyclists, inline skaters, joggers and pedestrians jockey for space. It’s claustrophobic and dangerous—the antithesis of the shoreline as a refuge from urban crowding.

So there’s reason to celebrate the onset of the three-phase project, which will alleviate the congestion by erecting a raised bike and pedestrian trail from the Ohio Street Beach on the north to parkland south of the Chicago River.

Great cities don’t rest on the laurels of their great public spaces. They make them greater. That’s what Chicago is doing here, despite the objections of naysayers who argued during the recession that the project was an unnecessary and unaffordable extravagance.

But recessions come and go. We only cheat ourselves if we use downturns as an excuse to lower our sights and not build a better future. Now the future and better times are here. The

feds have promised \$18 million for the project's \$26.4 million first phase. Springfield will pick up the rest. As Emanuel said Tuesday, "It's time to build it." Construction starts next week.

Called the "Navy Pier Flyover," the project was hatched more than a decade ago during the Daley administration. Like Emanuel, former Mayor Richard M. Daley is an avid biker. They both grasp the value of the lakefront trail, not just as a strip for recreation, but as a way to cut down on the number of people who drive to work and, with that, air pollution.

The Flyover's central location only enhances its value. It won't just **improve** north-south movement along Lake Michigan. It will upgrade east-west movement between the trail and Navy Pier, the state's top tourist attraction. Better access to the pier means a better economy.

The project will be built in three overlapping phases:

--Phase one will stretch from the lakefront trail just north of the Ohio Street Beach and stop along the north **bank** of the Ogden Slip, the narrow body of water southwest of Navy Pier. This phase, expected to be finished by 2016, will include a spur for bikes and pedestrians running parallel to the Lake Shore Drive exit ramp AND leading to the pier.

--Phase two will extend the main trail and the pier spur southward across the Ogden Slip. Then, like a stem at the bottom of the letter "Y," the two parts will form a single pathway past the now-scrubby site of the planned DuSable Park.